



The Slavs in Medieval History

Author(s): Jaroslav Bidlo

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THE SLAVS IN MEDIEVAL HISTORY.

FOR some centuries after their birth the Slav countries were inevitably to some extent subordinated to the older neighbouring countries, particularly the two Imperial states. Both of these great empires were destined many times to repeat their attempts to incorporate the Slavs and to make them their co-partners. The Byzantine Empire actually succeeded in imposing its will on the Bulgarians in 1018, but this was only a flash in the pan. The Bulgarians continued to hold out steadily and repeatedly rose in rebellion, taking advantage of Byzantine difficulties both at home and abroad, until in the year 1186 they once more obtained freedom. A similar attempt to deprive the Serbs of their independence was equally shortlived. Not only was Serbia difficult of access and inconvenient for the purposes of permanent occupation, but its inhabitants were stubborn fighters and sufficiently skilful diplomatists on occasions to secure the friendship of their would-be conquerors and use to the full Byzantine internal dissension. Their temporary dependence on the Byzantine Empire in the eleventh and twelfth centuries was not, therefore, particularly oppressive.

The relationship of the Czechs towards the Romano-Germanic Empire was somewhat similar. Although the Bohemian rulers acknowledged the feudal supremacy of the German kings and willingly performed the political services demanded of them, they took care to be granted numerous privileges, which successfully vindicated their claims to independence. As princes of the Empire, they intervened on many occasions in German internal politics, and contrived to win advantages for themselves from their participation. Bohemia was, nevertheless, until the end of the twelfth century, if not an integral part of the German Empire, at least an inseparable and wholly dependent part of it.

The Poles were somewhat more free, though they also required the permission of the German King before embarking on a definitely independent foreign policy, and were even forced in 1157 to acknowledge the overlordship of Frederick I after his decision in the dispute between the branches of the Piast dynasty.

The Slav states were dependent upon the German and Byzantine Empires for several reasons. Not only were they less

powerful and far worse organised than their neighbours, but they were often involved in dynastic squabbles, which kept them weak until the time when they instituted more satisfactory laws of succession. This unhappy state of affairs was encouraged by local interests and the lingering traditions of the individuality of the several Slav tribes. Collision with the forces making for centralisation was therefore inevitable. To add to the trouble, the ruling vassals continually and selfishly pressed their personal claims upon the Emperors and were jealous of all other, equally greedy, members of the Court. And in Russia things came to such a pass that at one time that vast country embraced more than sixty territorial principalities.

More favourable circumstances enabled the Czechs and the Serbs to throw off the shackles. They could do so the more easily because their proximity to the Imperial states made them aware of their danger. The Bohemians were in so far fortunate that their particular dynasty had been narrowed down to one line or strain. Equally fortunately, this happened at a time when both the German and the Byzantine Empires were beginning to be buffeted by those prolonged crises which ultimately deprived them of their supremacy.

Ever since the middle of the eleventh century, strife as to the relations between the Imperial power and the ecclesiastical or Papal power had been common. The contest was won by the Papacy, which, at the close of the twelfth century, gained a decisive preponderance and took advantage of its victory to undermine the foundations of the Empire in Germany. It urged to the attack all those elements which were interested in weakening German sovereignty. This onslaught, together with the chaos caused by the break-up of feudalism, in effect made Germany a mere loose mixture of heterogeneous and ill-assorted areas with divergent interests, a group of lands under the conflicting control of the Government, the Church, the central powers and hereditary lords. In these circumstances any united and forceful foreign policy was an impossibility.

The Byzantine Empire, after its lucky escape at the end of the eleventh century from destruction by the Seljuks, was for the next century threatened by the unfriendly West-European Crusaders, who originally were to have gone to its assistance, as Christians aiding Christians against the Saracens. The crusading movements were hailed with relief by the West-European peoples as new fields of adventure. In the wealthy East they hoped to find life easier, more comfortable and more profitable. Another wave of the same

current was represented by the commercial growth of Italy, and especially of Venice, then striving to attain commercial precedence in the Byzantine Empire. As Byzantium in its turn strove to thwart this, Venice became her implacable enemy. In the year 1204 the covetous Venetian merchants joined the hungry adventurous Crusaders and conquered the European possessions of the Byzantine Empire. The Byzantines, now thrust into Asia Minor, then strove to eject the "Latins." The result was a never ending war which weakened both sides so seriously that, neither alone nor in combination, could they arrest the conquering advance of the Turk, who was ever ready to profit by their mutual hostilities.

The political powerlessness of the German Empire aided the cause of the Czechs and Poles, while the decline of the Byzantine Empire and its strife with the "Latins" was of advantage to the Bulgarians and Serbs.

BOHEMIA.

After the death of the powerful Emperor, Henry VI, Pope Innocent III arbitrarily decided who should be his successor. The Czech Prince, Przemysl Otakar I, skilfully took the side of successive candidates to the Imperial throne, and thus secured for his own state, from both Emperor and Pope, full recognition. After the misfortunes of the Hohenstaufen dynasty (about the year 1250), King Wenceslas I and his son, Przemysl Otakar II, extended their old hereditary possessions by adding to them portions of the lands of the Empire, lands which in most cases had formed part of the hereditary territories of the Babenbergs. The economic progress of the Czech state, especially the rapid settlement and growth of towns and the consequent great impetus to industry and commerce, made the Bohemian kings long unconquerable among their neighbours. As a member of the German Empire, a privilege he adroitly and diplomatically claimed even after attaining sovereignty, the Czech King stretched out his hand even towards the Imperial Crown, mainly in order to keep alive his contested rights to possession of the Babenberg lands.

The development of a great Slav kingdom out of large areas which hitherto had been firmly bound to the German Empire—a probably hostile kingdom, moreover, which counted on ultimately shaking itself free from Germany—terrified and alarmed the Germans, even though the Czech King had already travelled so far along the road towards Germanisation that, by his own people, he was thought of rather as a German than a Czech. Accordingly, the new Emperor, Rudolf of Habsburg, was determined that the

supremacy of the Bohemian King in the Imperial possessions should cease. This aim was attained. But the overthrow and death of Przemysl Otakar II was only a temporary check to the progress and hostility of the Czech state. Even Rudolf himself gave his support when the son and successor of Przemysl, Wenceslas II, strove to extend his dominions—not, it is true, towards the South, where the Habsburgs had carved out their own family possessions, but away towards the East, in Poland. Rudolf's support was undoubtedly given because he foresaw that the Habsburgs, even with the aid of the whole Empire, would soon find themselves unable to prevent Czech expansion and political prosperity. The strength of the country was evidenced by its sturdy economic development—fostered under Wenceslas II and his immediate successors—and the successful exploitation of silver-mining, an economic resource which was to prove an important buttress of Bohemian policy.

A mere accident, the extinction of the dynastic race of Przemysl and the resulting protracted internal crisis, frustrated without a doubt the extension of the Czech power and influence in Poland and in Hungary; but the Czech state did not thereby cease to play a powerful part in the politics of the age. It began, indeed, to look towards quarters of less resistance, the North, Polish Silesia and the territories of certain of the Polabian Slavs. In this way the Luxemburg rulers of Bohemia also acquired Brandenburg, the quondam sphere of action of Albrecht the Bear, the Slav "destroyer." In spite of the growth of Western ideas and of a type of feudalism which allowed the nobles, the higher ecclesiastics and even the towns to retain a great degree of independence in their relations with their sovereign and with the state, and to become intermediaries between the master and the peasants, the disintegration never reached the stage it reached in France or in Germany. In these countries the state degenerated into an innumerable collection of tiny independent areas, where the sovereign was only the first among a group of equal political actors. In the countries subject to Czech rule, the individual lands retained their autonomous rights, supported by historical sanctions, and some even had their own princes, although they were parcelled out among different branches of the ruling family; but Bohemia proper, as the kernel, always retained a decisive preponderance, and the other divisions of the state were merely lands, "secondary" or "appended." Accordingly, when Germany became a free alliance of independent units, the Czech sovereign stood out high above the other Imperial

princes who were entitled to elect the German King, the future Roman Emperor. Accordingly, too, a member of the new dynasty, reigning in Bohemia, Charles IV, was able with complete success to repeat the effort which, owing perhaps to his Czech origin, had not succeeded when made by the famous Przemyśl II. This was nothing less than to aim at the Imperial Crown, and to make use of his candidature for ensuring and consolidating the advantages Bohemia held in regard to the German Empire.

If the old political traditions of the earlier Przemyśl had survived—as instanced both by Bohemia's life and death struggle with Germany and by her alliance with the Polabian Slavs—the Luxemburgs would have been obliged to carry on a consciously Slav policy in the lands which had once belonged to Poland—Sorbian Lusatia and Pomerania. But in fact those lands had now long been in the power of the German nobles, knights, towns and ecclesiastical authorities; and the remnants of the Slav peasantry had not sufficient political importance to attract the attention of the sovereign. In Bohemia proper and in Moravia the towns were almost completely German, while the nobility and higher clergy had only recently acquired a racial consciousness, which became more intensified as they saw with a jealous eye the increasing wealth of the rivals and the support which this wealth enabled the towns to give to the monarchy. Even the Hussites had felt their weakness as compared with the Germans, and in the wars against King Sigismund had realised the imminence of the question whether the Bohemian people were destined or not to survive as a nation. Accordingly, neither under Charles IV nor under Wenceslas IV and his successors was the suggestion ever clearly formulated that the "secondary" lands, which were originally Slav, but which had been seized by the Germans, might one day be ceded. The Hussite warriors of Procopius the Great, in invading these lands, wished merely to retaliate for the crusade carried on by the Germans against Bohemia.

The Czech state, built up by John of Luxemburg and Charles IV, was a dynastic state; the influences that went to its construction were, in the main, family interests; the aim of the founders was to acquire for their families as speedily as possible the largest number of possessions, quite irrespective of any political, racial or cultural fitness of the territories in question. This was the basis of the dual state, in which the German element revealed a tendency to keep aloof, while Bohemia, the "kernel," authorised and, under George Poděbrad, even encouraged a nationalist current—the Hussite movement.

The Hussite movement led to a notable crisis in the Czech state; its secondary lands were left to themselves, and Moravia was finally torn away and given to Albrecht of Habsburg. Nevertheless, it did not quite collapse. It survived the dangers of shipwreck under Matthias Corvinus, remained intact until the Thirty Years' War, and suffered real disaster for the first time only as a result of the aggressive policy of Frederick II. The principal causes of its stability and survival even during the Hussite crisis were the weakness and degeneracy of the German Empire; but some share in this must be given also to its fortunate central position, which was favourable to the cementing of many common, economic and cultural interests. Once the Habsburgs had gained the victory and power, they took care in their own interests to maintain their hold and to secure the ties linking Bohemia and the secondary lands. For the Habsburgs, no less than for the Luxemburgs, Bohemia was an indispensable basis for power in Germany, and the most profitable fountain of their economic strength in their wars against the Turks, until Hungary was ultimately conquered by the aid of Bohemian contributions.

If the Luxemburg king had not died prematurely, or if George Poděbrad had founded a dynasty, Bohemia would have enjoyed much greater political importance in Central Europe and, although dualistic, would have been far more able than it ever actually was to contribute to the development of the Slav element in the incorporated lands. This may be deduced from the rapid Bohemianisation of Upper Silesia during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Its local nobility adopted the Czech language, an example which was followed largely by the peasantry and urban population. Since Bohemia had lost its own dynasty and the times were not suitable for the founding of a new native one, two new and distinguished rival houses (the Jagellons and, later, the Habsburgs) were added to the number of ruling families. Like the Croats of old, who had joined the Magyars, so now the Bohemians maintained possession of an independent state, but its foreign policy had ceased to be Czech and was controlled first by a Jagellon, that is a Pole, and later by a Habsburg, representing German or Magyar interests.

The importance of Bohemia for the history of the Slavs in general lies mainly in her steadfast adhesion to a fixed policy. Though predominantly Slav by reason of the Czech majority, it had incorporated the often powerful forces which had developed out of the ruins and political bankruptcy of the German Empire. This combination provided a permanent and stable political foundation,

able to steer through many a serious crisis, to win international recognition and even to survive the later efforts of the Habsburgs to make themselves paramount within the framework of a predominantly German monarchy.

POLAND.

The Polish state, whose heterogeneous elements had for a time been held together by the personality and power of the sovereign, broke up at the turn of the twelfth century, when local interests were already too diverse and extreme to be kept under by the centralising forces. It did not completely disappear from the stage of history, however. The ecclesiastical organisation, under the Archbishop of Gniezno, remained undisturbed, and Poland formed a distinct ecclesiastical province. The clergy, who were the most educated class and whose ranks contained a number of historians, kept bright their hope and determination of seeing again an undivided State and a Polish sovereign on the throne. But it was long before any prince was powerful enough to bring this to pass. The attempt would have meant that all the other princes should bow to his will and acknowledge his supreme power. So frequent and so serious were the clashes of aims and of local interests that the way lay clear to foreign intervention. As the German Empire had begun since the time of Frederick I to turn its attention from Italy to Poland, it was not in a condition after the decline of the Imperial power to busy itself with the Slavonic East; and as further the strongest political power near Poland was Bohemia, it was inevitable that the latter country should seek to reap advantage from this condition of affairs, especially when the Habsburgs, in rivalry with the Przemysls, made it easy for them.

Accordingly, King Wenceslas II became by degrees the ruler of almost the whole of Poland and, in 1300, had himself crowned king. The wealthy and able Bohemian king, far more powerful than any Polish prince, succeeded with comparative ease in surmounting all obstacles and securing his power. Apart from its divided condition the country offered settlers many advantages and was especially attractive from an economic point of view. The Piasts, who assumed sovereignty over united Poland after Wenceslas' death, had nothing to do but to complete the process of unification, but their strength proved unequal to the task. There can be little doubt that, if Wenceslas had not died prematurely, the Piasts would not have established their claim to lands which had long formed the core and kernel of Poland. The country would not have lost

its political individuality, but would have become the bridge for Czech impetus and extension eastwards. This may be deduced from the successes of John of Luxemburg in his wars with the Poles and from the circumstance that the principality of Płock on the middle Vistula became a fief of the Bohemian king. It is true that a Czech overlordship in Poland would hardly have brought about any noteworthy extension of Czech influence to the detriment of the non-Slav population. Indeed, the rulers of Bohemia from the time of Przemysl II, especially John of Luxemburg, were favourable to the Military Order of the Teutonic knights.

Greatly to the misfortune of the Slavs, more especially the Poles and Pomeranians, these knights by force of conquest established themselves round the mouth of the Vistula. Their strong position there was a serious source of weakness to Poland, who was thus denied access to the sea. The Bohemian monarchs, with their advisers and commanders responsible for the royal policy, entirely failed to grasp the unfortunate consequences which the advance of the Military Order meant for the Slavs. They regarded the knights first and foremost as the protégés of the Papacy and propagators of the Christian faith; the good will of the Papal See was at all times of importance to them, and the spreading of their own religious faith weighed with them equally strongly. Later, however, in the time of John of Luxemburg, Charles IV and, to some extent even under Wenceslas IV, the Order came to be considered as a welcome ally in their rivalry with Poland.

Even without the episode of Czech overlordship, Poland would certainly have become united, though we may say with equal certainty that the unification would not have occurred until a much later date. The thirteenth and fourteenth centuries saw the rise of a number of strong states near Poland: first of all Bohemia itself, and then Hungary, regenerated with the help of the Angevins. Moreover, there was Lithuania, which rapidly and successfully overran Western Russia, and, most important of all for Poland, the State of the Teutonic Order, which carried on in the Eastern Marches the aggressiveness of the German Empire. Even earlier, before Wenceslas II had consolidated his rule in Poland, a movement of "nationalism" had arisen in Poland, a determination to aim at internal unification. In the forefront of this movement stood at all times the Archbishop of Gniezno, supported by all the clergy. But in the absence of any native unifier, there was nothing to stop foreigners from stepping into the breach.

Without Czech aid the Piasts would have had a very difficult

task, for it was not until 1320 that the national hero, Wladyslaw Łokietek, succeeded in being crowned king, and even then some of the larger areas, including Mazovia, retained their independence. The formation of the new united Poland of the Piasts was a success over many difficulties, and it was not carried out without many sacrifices. Bohemia had to be granted Silesia, Germanised it is true and long actually independent; Pomerania and the adjacent territories of Michalov and Chełm had to be surrendered to the Teutonic Order. As a set-off against these losses, Poland obtained Galicia, which had just then lost its dynasty. Yet here, too, there were disadvantages, for a difficult war had to be waged against Lithuania, waged, too, with the aid of Hungary, who was induced to lend assistance on the strength of a promise that at some future time Galicia would come under the Hungarian throne.

This promise was destined to have very irritating results, for it obliged the Poles to invite the Hungarian king, Louis, to accept their throne, and that implied the subordination of the external policies of Poland to those of Hungary, besides a danger of the loss of Galicia. Although the political successes of Casimir the Great, truly described by Polish historians as having found a wooden Poland and left a stone one, depended to a marked extent upon the union of Hungary's forces with those of Poland, as a counterbalance to Czech influence, yet on his death in 1370, consequences all too unhappy appeared, and the Polish politicians (the lay and ecclesiastical magnates) took the bold and far-reaching step of inviting the great Lithuanian prince, Jagello, to be king of Poland. The move was all the more daring and worthy of note because Lithuania had hitherto been Poland's rival in the Western plains of Russia. Before Poland's union with Hungary, Lithuania had lost something of its full independence in foreign affairs, but it had subsequently become strong enough to force Poland on many occasions to subordinate her interests to those of the Baltic state.

The Poles did not succeed, it is true, in directly incorporating this big Lithuania and its great West Russian territories with their own country, as Jagello had promised them would be the case in 1385; Poland, having the support of Lithuania, was, however, throughout the whole Jagellon period a powerful unit, holding sway over a wide area. As early as 1387, when Wladyslaw Jagello visited Lwow to assume his lordship over Ruthenia, the Voivode of Moldavia swore fealty to him and, somewhat later, both the Wallachian and Bessarabian chieftains did likewise.

The united forces of Poland and Lithuania inflicted in 1410

at Grünwald a severe defeat on the forces of the Teutonic Order, a foe common to both; this defeat was to mean the cessation for a long time to come of the spread of German influence eastwards, at the expense of Slav and non-Slav alike. The earlier rivalry between the Luxemburgs and the Piasts, a rivalry which, under John of Luxemburg and Charles IV, had provoked strained relations between the Czechs and the Poles, had now given place to a rivalry between Luxemburgs and Jagellons. This rivalry was like a tug of war, with Poland and Lithuania on one side and on the other Hungary and Germany, ruled by Sigismund of Luxemburg. This new rivalry during the Hussite wars became centred on the question of the succession to the Bohemian throne; but the fall and extinction of the Luxemburgs and the disturbances in the Czech state were helpful to the Polish-Lithuanian unit, in so far at least as to forward its international influence and prestige.

It is not surprising that Poland was expected to avert the Turkish danger to Europe, by delivering the Balkan Slavs from their yoke and coming forward as the champion of the Byzantine Empire. The Jagellons seemed fated to be the heirs of the Luxemburgs, both in Hungary and in Bohemia. Poland was thus destined to be the gathering point, the focus, of all the Slav peoples. Although events did not turn out as they might have done after the Habsburgs entered the arena in competition with the Jagellons and new native dynasties (Poděbrad and Corvinus) sought to adopt an independent policy, yet Poland long continued to exercise a powerful individual influence in Central Europe. She made her power felt far and wide and, under King Casimir IV (1447-1492), began to attain to some degree of internal unity by bringing into subjection the local princedoms which had hitherto been mere fiefs loosely connected with her, and by dealing a new blow at the Teutonic Order. In this way Poland gained possession in 1460 of the mouth of the Vistula and thus had direct access to the Baltic Sea.

In their dynastic rivalry with the Habsburgs, the Jagellons succeeded in acquiring Bohemia and Hungary. These countries were under different rulers from those in Poland and Lithuania, and this caused a fresh political competition for Roumania between Poland and Hungary, but there continued to be sufficient unanimity in foreign affairs to ensure that all the Jagellon lands, both in Eastern and in Western Europe, formed essentially one political unit, under Polish control and owing Polish allegiance. The Habsburgs were for a long time incapable of pitting themselves seriously against the Jagellons. It was not until the Emperor,

Maximilian I, secured a brilliant success for his own family in Spain, which already seemed to be likely to have a magnificent future, that the strength of the Jagellons, weakened on the East by the extension of Muscovite power, began to wane. Maximilian, early conscious of the weakness on the Eastern frontier, concluded with the Grand Duke of Muscovy a warlike alliance, thus forcing the Jagellon dynasty to cede the Bohemian and Hungarian thrones (1515). A further reason for the making of such a concession was the physical degeneracy of the race of Jagello, which by 1526 had been reduced to one man—the Polish king, Sigismund I.

The accession of the younger branches of the Habsburgs to these thrones marked a notable lessening of the power and political influence of the Jagellons and, consequently, of Poland. But Poland, nevertheless, continued to be a very important and powerful state, especially because Lithuania was brought into ever closer union—a union which became more and more a subjection. In the year 1569, indeed, Lithuania was forced to conclude with Poland an enduring legal unity, “the United Commonwealth” (*Rzeczpospolita*), which meant that Polish law and administration were extended to Lithuania, and, as a natural concomitant, the Polish nobility, the Polish language and Polish culture were given free access to Lithuania, whereby both it and the neighbouring Russian provinces rapidly became Polonised. The peculiarly democratic nobility of Poland, fundamentally different from the feudal nobility of Western Europe, and the centralism of an absolute type of monarchy, popularised their political franchises and privileges among the lower ranks of the nobility of the adjacent lands, and formed a firm cement for the unified state, although this was a consideration which escaped the notice of foreigners, who saw in the system only its unconstitutional and anarchic traits.

The alliance of the Habsburgs with Moscow proved in time no great danger, and Poland, having commenced a struggle with Moscow for the disintegrated State of the Teutonic Order, or, rather, for Livonia and the Gulf of Riga, won a decisive ascendancy over the Muscovites and, at the end of the sixteenth century, drove them back from the seaboard far into the interior. A considerable part of the old State of Livonia was, it is true, annexed by the Swedes and Danes; but, nevertheless, the Polish rule over the rest of Livonia signified a notable weakening of the German elements, which had had ascendancy there over the native inhabitants.

The Habsburgs, audacious and greedy of power, fired by their earlier successes, strove to make use of the dying out of the Jagellon

dynasty, in 1572, with a view to mastering and subordinating to their own interests both Poland and Lithuania ; this effort was, however, very firmly resisted by most of the older Polish nobles, who were suspicious of any symptoms of absolutism and were equally antagonistic to all such Germanophil tendencies as had been patent in Bohemia. The spokesman of the Polish nobility, John Zamoyski, in his negotiations with William of Rosenberg (1589), who, under orders from the Emperor Rudolf II, was working in Poland in the interests of the latter's brother, Maximilian, expressed these views when he declared that the accession to the Polish throne of any Habsburg would involve the whole of Slavdom in disaster.

As we have already said in the course of this article, the Poles as well as the Czechs profited by the weakness which characterised the German Empire during the long period that elapsed between the latter half of the thirteenth century and the date of its revival in the year 1871. It is this fact that helps us to understand how Wladyslaw Łokietek succeeded (1310-1311) in overcoming a rising of the German towns in Poland and why the age-long struggle of Poland against the Teutonic Military Order was not accompanied by such serious difficulties as might well have ended in leading the State to the very brink of ruin. For the Order, even without the assistance of the German Empire, long hindered Poland's successful development. It is true that the Luxemburgs, especially Sigismund, treated the Order as an authority representative of the German Empire ; but the measure of support they received from this attitude of theirs was extremely small. Equally unimportant and equally indifferent to Poland were the steps taken by the Habsburgs in the name of the German Empire to aid the Order in Prussia and later in Livonia ; for their aid was never consistently lent and had no military value.

BULGARIA.

Almost simultaneously with the political development of Bohemia and of Poland, which was consequent on the decline of the German Empire, the Bulgarians and the Serbians also obtained independence of the Byzantine Empire and profited in the same way from its fall. Each of these states acquired for a certain time a notable political prestige and international influence.

The Bulgarians, who had already rebelled several times in vain, renewed their opposition to Byzantine rule in 1186 and, with the co-operation of the Vlachs or Roumanians, and even of the Kumans, re-created their former state, the core of which was (as it had been formerly) the territory between the Danube and the

Balkans. The rebellion of the Bulgarians succeeded only because the Byzantine Empire was at this period menaced by enemies on many sides. The fall of the Byzantine Empire, that is, its overthrow by the Western Crusaders and Venetians, unloosed in the Balkan Peninsula and in the Levant a general inter-state war, and the resulting anarchy brought about the formation of a number of extensive, though short-lived, states, resting upon the hazardous chances of war. These states were held together by the prestige of vigorous warriors; but discord was rife, and their rulers never lived long enough to consolidate their position. Such was the realm of the Greek-Epirote Tsar Theodore, or that of the Bulgarian Tsar John Asen II, who, in 1230, overthrew the empire of Tsar Theodore. John Asen II founded an empire which resembled in its content that formerly held by the mighty Tsar Simeon; and he, like Simeon, sought to conquer Constantinople (in which city the "Latins" now ruled). But with the death of Asen, in 1241, this varied assortment of territories disintegrated. The Bulgarians, it is true, maintained possession of the core, and by the beginning of the fourteenth century had established themselves in a fairly sound position in the midst of stronger neighbours; but since the death of John Asen II they had passed through very anxious times. Their country had become dependent upon Hungary and was the scene of the struggle of the Nicean Empire with the Hungarians for ascendancy in the Balkan Peninsula. About 1260 it became the jumping off ground for yet another attack of the "Latins" against the Byzantines, who were trying again to capture Constantinople and to expel not only the descendants of the Crusaders of 1204, but also the Hungarians, who ever since the end of the twelfth century had been penetrating into the territories of the former Byzantine Empire in the Balkans. The Nicean Greeks actually succeeded in driving the Hungarians out of Bulgaria and taking possession of it. When Bulgaria struggled for independence, the Byzantines, whose Empire had been revived in 1261, encircled her by making an alliance with the Mongol Tartars, who were then the rulers of the steppes to the north of the Black Sea. Bulgaria suffered for a time the destructive inroads of the Tartars and even became dependent upon them. Later the interests of this unsatisfactory ally of the Byzantine Empire became subservient to Serbia (under the Tsar Stephen Dušan).

Failure in foreign policy prevented co-ordination and centralisation of the component parts of the state and strengthened the forces making for disruption. About 1365 the Tsar John Alexander

added to this disruption by giving Vidin to his son John Sracimir as a personal possession. All the territory which was later to be known as the Dobrudža, had formed a special political unit since the year 1346 ; so that Bulgaria was now divided into three parts. Civil war broke out upon the death of the mighty Tsar Stephen Dušan, and the Turks, who had established themselves firmly in the Peninsula in 1352 and were in a position to take immediate steps to extend their dominions at the expense of their Balkan rivals, were quick to take advantage of this state of affairs. In 1393, the Bulgarians, worn out by strife and by renewed wars with the Hungarians and with the Byzantines, became a prey to the Turks.

SERBIA.

Serbia enjoyed a similar position on the map to that of Bulgaria ; and there is thus a similarity between the parts played by these two countries in international politics. The only important difference was that Serbia had an even more favourable position, so that her history was on the whole happier. Having in the twelfth century successfully defended her independence against the Byzantine Empire, she was marked out even before the downfall of the latter as one of the natural heirs to its inheritance. But the fourth Crusade, which made an end of the Byzantine Empire, brought upon Serbia a crop of new difficulties rather than any alleviation of her troubles. Serbia took a long time to disentangle herself from the confusion consequent on the inter-state dissensions in the Balkans which started in 1204. Indeed, she required for this purpose great political skill, which, however, was not wanting in her rulers, or rather, in their political advisers, who were generally drawn from the ranks of the higher ecclesiastical notables, bishops and dignitaries. We may take as the prototype of this school of skilful Serbian statesmen Stephen Nemanja, founder of the dynasty and the real maker of the Serbian Empire of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. It is true that, when faced as he constantly was with very difficult and changeable political situations, he was not too fastidious in his methods, but he was nevertheless a very enterprising military leader. His son, Stephen Uroš, by using diplomatic rather than warlike methods, brought his state at a very difficult period to a really honourable and influential position, and surrounded himself with regal dignity, in spite of his powerful Magyar neighbours. His position was approved by the Papal See and given recognition by others of his neighbours, including the Byzantine Empire. Stephen Uroš succeeded too in bringing about the internal

consolidation of his realm ; for he contrived greatly to diminish the dual nature of its culture, which was due to the division of the Serbians into Catholics (Diocleá) and Orthodox (Raška). In addition, he managed to subjugate those princes who were still in power in some of the lesser territories belonging to Serbia, so that, in appearance at least, all the Serbian lands were a single united state.

During that period when the strongest powers in the Balkans were the Empire of the Epirote Despots and the Tsardom of the Bulgarians and when there raged incessant war between the Greeks and their Balkan rivals (the Latin Empire, the Epirote Despotism, Hungary, and the Latin states of Hellas and the Peloponnese), Serbia, though only a passive onlooker, succeeded in turning the course of events skilfully to her advantage. Every change in the political orientation of the Balkans was accompanied by a timely change of Serbia's ruler, so that on the Serbian throne there always sat a partisan of the power then in the ascendant in the Peninsula. This was a weak policy, a policy neither glorious nor sound, but it had its practical advantages. It was carried out not by the rulers, but by the lay and ecclesiastical notables. Such a policy assured to Serbia a spell of freedom from disaster during a most critical period and disentangled her, without misfortune to herself, from the Balkan embroglio. She was thus able to enter the conflict as the freshest combatant at a moment when her neighbours were worn out by mutual wars. The country was by this time in a strong economic position, for the necessity of finding means for the upkeep of the state during the preceding difficult years had led to the discovery of fruitful deposits of precious and other metals. It was at about the same time that the Bohemians started to work their silver mines more industriously and that the profits of this industry became the most important source of strength to King Wenceslas II and his successors. The Serbian rulers were able to organise a strong mercenary army and finally to take a leading part as the strongest single factor in the interminable Balkan struggles.

Great difficulties had to be overcome by Serbia when, in 1261, the Nicean Emperor reconquered Constantinople and renewed Byzantine rule over a large area of the Balkan Peninsula, while at the same time the Hungarians were extending their power in these parts. Serbia was ground between these two mutual rivals as between two millstones ; and her position was rendered all the more impossible by the fact that the powerful Sicilian King, Charles of Anjou, was preparing a crusade, in the name of the Western

Church, to avenge the overthrow by Byzantium of the Latin Empire. Serbia's religious and cultural sympathies drew her towards Byzantium, but she was compelled to join her enemies, and even to acknowledge the supremacy of Hungary. Since, however, Hungary was in the throes of a protracted national crisis, this was rather to Serbia's advantage. Owing to her critical international position, Serbia was now compelled to adopt an opportunist and constantly changing policy, mainly hostile to the Byzantine Empire. This did not meet with the approval of the majority of the country's inhabitants and was especially in direct opposition to the views of the more highly educated classes, that is, of the ecclesiastics. Thus, in the latter half of the thirteenth and first quarter of the fourteenth centuries, the country was torn by internal dissensions arising from mutual disagreements between the partisans of the Western Church and culture, and those of Byzantium. These disagreements even influenced the choice of a ruler to sit upon the throne ; but the Serbian parties never carried their bickerings to extremes. The partisans of Byzantine culture were very ably and wisely led by their ecclesiastics, who were always ready to accept a compromise. Thus, slowly but surely, Serbia pushed forward until all unawares, under Stephen Dušan (1332-55), she had become the most powerful political factor in the Balkan Peninsula, with the best chance of succeeding to the threadbare and patchwork fabric of the Byzantine Empire and of becoming the natural rallying point of the forces of Balkan Christianity in their efforts to stave off the menacing Turk.

Taking advantage of the civil wars raging among the peoples of the Byzantine Empire, Stephen Dušan easily and quickly annexed extensive Byzantine territories inhabited mainly by Greeks, and in 1346 had himself crowned Emperor of the Serbs and Greeks. The conquest of Constantinople itself seemed a question merely of time. Charles IV, when on his way to Rome to receive the crown of the Western or Roman Empire in February, 1355, sent from Pisa his historic letter in which, *inter alia*, he congratulated Dušan and rejoiced that both Imperial crowns were now upon the heads of Slav rulers, who spoke the "sublime" Slavonic language. He declared this fact to be of great historical importance, as testifying to the tremendous progress made by the Slavs in a relatively short time among the older peoples of Europe.

Although the possession of the Imperial crown did not add to Charles IV's power and Dušan's efforts to seize Constantinople were thoroughly ineffective, yet we must not forget that both were

powerful monarchs, the one being without any rival, and the other much more influential than the legitimate Byzantine Emperor of the time (John V) and the "Anti-emperor" (John Kantakuzenos).

The premature death of Dušan caused the disintegration of his embryo empire and finally its downfall. He died at the height of his fame, a happy and glorious empire-builder, the ideal of the medieval conqueror. But his great reign proved to have been rather a misfortune to Serbia than an advantage, since the military governors, whom he had posted in outlying areas, were soon isolated and the power of the monarch was thus greatly weakened even in the central Serbian lands, where hitherto the ruler had been all-powerful. Serbia proper was, after the Serb ruler's death, smaller and weaker than it had been for a long time past. It became an easy prey to feudal tendencies at a time when it had the greatest need of a central government. For the ambitious Turkish Empire was beginning to tower above its neighbours merely by virtue of a centralised and uniform administration.

The Southern Serbian states, inhabited mainly by Greeks and Bulgarians, had in 1371 been brought under Turkish rule. The Serbs, who inhabited Serbia proper, Bosnia and the territories along the Morava, defied Turkish conquest for a long time, in spite of the disastrous defeat they sustained at Kosovo in 1389. Bosnia, under the rule of King Tvrtko (1353-1391), extended its domains considerably, assumed a leadership among the Serbs and followed aims similar to those of Serbia under Dušan. At the beginning of the fifteenth century Serbia still felt herself strong enough to entertain thoughts of an attack upon the Turks. But the progress of the latter was facilitated by the continuing welter and confusion of Balkan politics. Serbia gradually fell into the hands of the Turks, until in 1459 the last remnant (Smederevo) came under their power. Serbia had outlived the Byzantine Empire, and the Serbs continued to defy the advancing Turks, even after the fall of the Balkan states, Bosnia and Hercegovina, in Hungary and Croatia. In their war against the Turk the Serbs never laid down their arms. In insurrection after insurrection they rose against his dominion, and Serbian outlaws and *hajduks*, either as auxiliaries to foreign armies or else as freebooters in Turkish territories, strove to realise the hopes of the people for revenge and the recovery of their freedom.

And as formerly in the period of independence there had been opportunists, so now, besides the national heroes, there were those who, while in constant touch with the insurgents, endeavoured by means of ostentatious attachment to the Turkish *régime* to obtain

relief and benefits to lighten their people's burden under the heavy Turkish yoke. There were, too, individuals like the Grand Vizier, Mohammed Sokolović (about the year 1557), who embraced Islam and made use of their influential position to relax the pressure and secure the continued existence as a race of their Christian fellow-subjects.

CROATIA AND SLOVAKIA.

In the course of the twelfth century, and particularly during the thirteenth century, the position of Croatia had so greatly improved that it obtained a very considerable measure of independence in its relations with Hungary. Her good fortune was further helped by timely internal discords in Hungary, dynastic troubles of the Árpáds and the encroachments of neighbours, especially of the Byzantines under the Emperor Manuel Comnenus (1143-1180), upon the territories of Hungary. Croatia at this period came temporarily under the sway of the Byzantines. The return of Croatia to Hungary was brought about by King Béla III, but only on condition that he assured its independence under his own son, Emerich, who was even crowned king of Croatia and Dalmatia. Henceforth the Croats again and again demanded that they should have their own administration, with a king or a duke of the race of Árpád at its head. The Hungarian monarchs, on the other hand, strove to reduce the country to the level of an administrative area similar to other Hungarian territories. Béla IV finally divided Croatia into two Banats, but, before the battle of Kressenbrunn (1260) he was obliged by the Croats to allow the whole of Croatia to be ruled by a single duke, a member of the royal family.

With the improvement of relations between Croatia and Hungary, some Croat nobles rose to high power; for the monarchs, in the course of their dynastic internecine struggles, were obliged to reward them and make sure of their loyalty and support. This was also occasionally done by the rival claimants (brothers or sons of the monarchs). Furthermore, the aggressive foreign policy of the Hungarian kings who, from the end of the twelfth century, had undertaken in rapid succession several onerous and difficult tasks, was of advantage to Croatia. The Croat nobility benefited also from the incessant wars with the Venetians for the possession of the Dalmatian towns (especially Zara) and the struggle for the Babenberg succession. The Counts of Krk (later the Frangopans), the great families of Šubić, Babonić, Svačić and Kačić held a feudal position resembling that of West European vassals with a defined duty to the king and were almost completely independent in their

own dominions. Croatia could have torn itself completely free from Hungary during the critical time which followed the downfall of the Árpáds (1301), if the menace of Venetian expansion had not obliged her leading notables once more to seek support in Hungary, as in the time of Koloman I.

Even while the last of the Árpáds was still alive, the Šubić family had made such headway that its head, Paul, was the actual lord of Dalmatian Croatia and the border districts of Bosnia. With Venice in their minds, the Šubićs supported the Neapolitan Angevins who, in their turn, tended to lean upon the Magyars and resisted the decentralising and determined efforts of the magnates in the frontier states of Hungary. Although the Angevins broke the power of the Šubić family, Croatia, until the year 1345, enjoyed complete independence. But internal feuds and jealousies destroyed the advantage offered by this favourable period to ensure the permanent separation of the country from Hungary. The Šubićs, who might have best been able to carry out such a task, did not show sufficient political skill and foresight. Later, also, the war-ridden and feverish condition of Hungary afforded the Croats many further opportunities, but the unending squabbles between the various powerful families were an obstacle to any successful bid for independence.

While things were so critical in Hungary, not only Croatia but also Slovakia, whose overlord was Matthew Čák of Trenčín, was for a long period separated from Hungary, and the Angevin King Charles Robert was too weak to compel Matthew to recognise his overlordship. Matthew died unconquered in 1321, and only after his death was Slovakia again annexed by Hungary.

Thus, the decline of the Hungarian State in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries was due both to the dying out of the Árpád dynasty and to the attempts by the Slavs, Germans or Roumanians of the non-Magyar areas to take things into their own hands. They did not, it is true, enjoy the sympathy of the non-Magyar populations, but were actuated by purely selfish desires, the desire to create such an oligarchy as had provoked the Bulgarian rising, under the Asens, against the Byzantine Empire (1186). The Asens were not Bulgar, but Kuman in origin; and yet their decentralising efforts brought about the regeneration of the Bulgarian kingdom. Something similar might well have occurred in Hungary, especially in Slovakia and in Croatia. But the Angevins, leaning naturally upon the Magyars who dominated the centre of the country, were able, slowly at first but later more

rapidly, to subdue the proud magnates. They subdued them in time—an easy enough thing to do, for their possessions were separated from one another by Magyar territories. The Angevins had originally been supported by the Šubićs but, when once they had succeeded in entrenching themselves in the centre of Hungary, the only profitable thing for them to do was to identify their own dynastic interests with those of the Magyar nobility and the higher order of ecclesiastics, and to resist decentralisation. Thus it was not long before the unity of the Hungarian State was restored to a better condition than under the Árpáds. Unfortunately, further dynastic struggles in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and the victorious progress of the Turks prevented any permanent success ; but they were not different in this respect from the Croats and the Slovaks, who did not produce any national champions capable of taking advantage of the Magyar weakness to liberate the Slavs. Jiskra of Brandýs who, about 1450, bore a part in the revival of Slovak nationalism, was a mere tool of the Habsburgs. From the Habsburgs, in the sixteenth century, aid and support had to be sought against the rising Turkish flood. Croatia and Slovakia may be said to have formed the Hungarian dominion of the Habsburgs.

RUSSIA.

While the Southern or Balkan Slavs, in the latter half of the fourteenth century, found themselves in danger of being submerged by a fresh wave of Turko-Tartar aggression, which indeed engulfed some sections of this branch of the Slav race, the Russians were beginning to throw off the Tartar yoke which had lain so heavily on them ever since the middle of the thirteenth century. In 1380 the Grand Duke of Moscow, Dmitry, won a famous victory over the Khan of the Golden Horde, the overlord of Eastern Russia, on the Don, and this was the first successful attempt to throw off the yoke of bondage. Although this was no lasting victory, Dmitry had at least shown the Tartars not to be invincible, and had raised hopes of deliverance in the hearts of the Russian people.

Dmitry was able to make head against the Tartars because the Grand Duchy of Moscow was a well-knit and healthy political organisation, in which the interests of its inhabitants did not run counter to those of the ruler. The prosperity of the State was based upon colonisation. There was a great influx of inhabitants from other countries, because it was much less exposed to the dangers of Tartar invasion and was the meeting point of many commercial highways. The colonists recognised in the sovereign

a ruler who had plenary powers to act for his State and to command his subjects without reference to their wishes. The ever-present Tartar peril, but also the favours which the Muscovite princes enjoyed from the Tartars, forced the Russians to cling as closely as possible to their ruler, under whom they found existence easier than would have been the case under any other prince.

The Muscovite princes were not satisfied with voluntary immigration into their dominions, but sought to increase the extent of their realm and to extend its frontiers. We need only point to the nickname of Ivan I, "Kalita," "the Purse" or "the Miser." They were good rulers, though personally selfish and greedy and always anxious to increase their possessions and dominions. In the course of time there grew up around Moscow an extensive area, a domain which, even in size, compactness and in the unity of its administration, surpassed any previous East Russian principality. This welding together of scattered territories under the rule of the Moscow Grand Dukes was in the main undertaken for personal and private advancement. In spite of the division of these territories among different branches of the ruling family, the Grand Duchy held together for a considerable period, and when the benefits of settled rule became apparent, it was natural for people to appreciate the value of uniting under a ruler of the Orthodox faith, to do battle for their own deliverance from the Tartar yoke.

This idea began to gain ground after Dmitry's victory over the Tartars in 1380. The Grand Dukes strove to extend their power over the minor nobles still independent of Moscow. In these efforts they had the support of the Orthodox Church for, after the fall of Constantinople (1453), many Slav refugees fled to Russia and preached the necessity of freeing all Orthodox Christians from the infidel overlordship and uniting them in a new Roman Empire, with its seat at Moscow, which was to be the "Third Rome." Ivan III (1462-1505), who had married the niece of the last Byzantine Emperor, Sophia Paleologa, considered himself the heir of the Byzantine Emperors and the appointed and rightful defender of Orthodox Christianity. The earlier efforts of the Moscow Grand Dukes to extend their domains were thus given a new moral support, and Ivan III began to assume the title of "Grand Duke of All Russia," thus voicing a claim even to the West Russian lands, which recognised the overlordship of the Grand Dukes of Lithuania.

As Lithuania naturally opposed this claim, it could not be enforced without war; but meanwhile the conquest of East Russia went forward with hitherto unequalled rapidity and success, and the

huge territories of the Novgorod Republic were annexed. The Grand Duchy of Moscow, which in 1480 had thrown off the supremacy of the Tartars and begun to bend the Tartars to its own political aims, had become, by the end of the fifteenth century, so mighty that it aroused the attention and interest of Western Europe ; the Emperor Frederic III, in particular, who was ambitious to advance his family and was a rival of the Jagellons, foresaw in it a possible ally. The Emperor Maximilian I made this idea a reality in 1514, to the great damage of Slav and especially of Czecho-Polish interests. The Duchy became still more powerful in the early years of the sixteenth century, for by then it had incorporated the remaining independent East Russian States. It took its place alongside of united Poland and Lithuania and was a mighty Slav State, not indeed without internal dissensions but holding in the East of Europe a position almost similar to that of the Hispano-Habsburg Empire in the West. Although still menaced by the Tartars, who hemmed it in on the East and South and subjected it to frequent raids, it was nevertheless able to retaliate by pushing forward to Kazan, Astrakhan and Siberia and so, by systematic colonisation, to consolidate its dominion. Even as Spanish rule spread throughout the New World, so the Russian Empire spread throughout the boundless plains of Northern Asia, ever moving forward towards the Pacific Ocean.

The war against the nomads of the steppes had its advantages for others ; it hampered Moscow in its aggressive measures against the Polish-Lithuanian Kingdom and, in spite of tension which more than once caused hostilities, a *modus vivendi* between the two neighbours mostly prevailed. Although the attempts of Ivan the Terrible (1533-1584) to take possession of Livonia and so win a portion of the Baltic coast-line caused a great war between Poland and Moscow (1563-1570 and 1576-1582), yet both sides made repeated efforts to settle these disputes by proposing to elect the ruler of the one realm to the throne of the other ; the Polish-Lithuanian union having proved beneficial, it was to be extended to a Polish-Lithuanian-Muscovite union ; but these attempts invariably broke down. Such were the relations of the only two independent Slav states at the end of the sixteenth century, when Bohemia and the remnants of the Croat State were in the power of the alien Habsburgs and the Serbian and Bulgar states had long since fallen to ruins and lay prostrate under the yoke of the Turk.

JAROSLAV BIDLO.